

System Configuration Team (SCT)
Reasonable & Prudent Measure #26
Meeting Notes
December 17, 1997

I. Greetings and Introductions.

The December 17 meeting of the System Configuration Team was held at the National Marine Fisheries Service's offices in Portland, Oregon. The meeting was co-chaired by Bill Hevlin of NMFS and Jim Ruff of the Northwest Power Planning Council staff. The agenda and a list of attendees for the December 17 meeting are attached as Enclosures A and B.

The following is a distillation (not a verbatim transcript) of items discussed at the meeting, together with actions taken on those items. Please note that some enclosures referenced may be too lengthy to routinely include with the meeting notes; copies of all enclosures referred to in the minutes are available upon request from Kathy Ceballos of NMFS at 503/230-5420.

II. Review of NPPC Scoping Document -- Council Review of Corps' Mainstem Capital Construction Program.

As most of you are aware, Ruff began, the Council has been directed by Congress to review the Corps' Columbia River Fish Mitigation program, with assistance from the Independent Scientific Advisory Board. As one of the first steps in that review, he said, we have produced a draft scoping document titled "Council Review of the Corps' Mainstem Capital Construction Program" (attached as Enclosure C). Ruff also introduced Mark Walker, the head of the Council's Public Affairs division, who has worked with Congress on a number of similar reviews.

Since this scoping document was distributed prior to today's meeting, said Ruff, I hope that you all have had an opportunity to review it, and I would be happy to entertain any questions or comments you might have. In response to a question, Ruff said the draft scoping document was approved for general release by the Council at its meeting last week, and has subsequently been distributed throughout the region.

Ruff went briefly through the contents of Enclosure C – purpose, goal and objectives, scope, schedule, coordination, public comment process etc. (please see Enclosure C for details). He noted that a series of meetings and presentations have been scheduled at various locations around the region, to allow an opportunity for public comment on the review process:

December 11: Resident Fish Managers' Meeting

December 17: SCT Meeting

Anadromous Fish Managers' Meeting

December 18: Presentation Following the Transition Board Meeting

January 9: Public Meeting in Spokane.

Again, we are hoping to get any comments the SCT membership may have at today's meeting, said Ruff. In response to a question from Ron Boyce, Ruff said it is not the Council's intent to cover the operational aspects of transportation in this review; transport operations are currently under review by the ISAB, he said, and we are hoping to have the results of that review by the time the Council's CRFM review is completed.

So the ultimate end-product of this review will be some guidance or direction from the Council on the major components of the CRFM program, such as surface bypass? asked the Corps' Dave Ponganis. Actually, I'm not sure I can tell you exactly what the outcome of this review will be, Ruff replied – all the language from Congress says is that the Council shall review the program, with the help of the ISAB.

Looking at this review from an SCT perspective, said Hevlin, I'm wondering how this process might help the SCT resolve some of the problems it faced last year. The first one that comes to mind, for me, is a scientific review of the issues we were struggling with last winter, when all we were really able to do was develop dueling issue papers expressing the conflicting points of view within SCT on various issues. What we lacked at that time, said Hevlin, was an independent third party that could take an objective look at the science supporting each issue paper. I am hopeful that, in the course of the Council review, the ISAB will have a chance to look at the science behind the arguments we developed last year, on things like John Day extended-length screens, Bonneville bypass improvements etc., he continued. Ruff said he would address this question later in his review.

Ruff continued on through Enclosure C, touching on the scope of and schedule for the review. Basically, we have to submit our report to Congress by June 30, and there is a lot of work to be done in the interim, he said. Based on the comments we receive from SCT and other technical groups, as well as those put forward during our public meetings, the Council will prepare a final work plan for submission to the Council at their meeting in Olympia on January 13-14. We hope to obtain the Council's approval to begin the actual review at that meeting, said Ruff; as soon as that approval is received, we will get the ISAB to work on the technical questions associated with this review, and the Council to work on the policy questions. That process is expected to continue through May, Ruff added; it is possible that the ISAB may ask to hear pro and con presentations from the tribal and federal parties on some items, such as John Day extended-length screens.

Our hope is that the ISAB can complete its scientific review in time to submit a report on its findings at the May Council meeting, Ruff continued; Council staff will present options on policy and technical issues at the same time, such that what we will have, in essence, is a draft report by mid-May. After that, there will be an opportunity for public comment on both the policy and technical questions addressed in the review, probably during the last two weeks in May. At the June Council work session, we will present a draft final report, based on those public comments. That will leave just a week or two to incorporate any final comments from the Council and to submit the final report to Congress, said Ruff.

Some SCT participants raised the concern that, if inadequately coordinated, at least a part of the Council's review could duplicate the SCT's efforts. Our intent is to coordinate closely with

SCT, all the way through the review process, said Ruff – in fact, we’re hoping the SCT can help shape the review itself. What about the connection between the Council review and the 1999 decision process? asked BPA’s John Rowan. Theoretically, at least, by early 1999, the multiple system configuration pathways currently under consideration will be narrowed down, Rowan said – that means that the recommendations in the Council review could be in place for only six months, and I guess I’m curious how the two processes will work together.

I would add that the last sentence of the “Purpose of Review” section of the scoping document – “...The purpose of the capital construction review is to identify the need for multiple passage strategies and whether some strategies can be modified or even eliminated for technical reasons” – almost makes it sound as though the Council is pre-judging the 1999 decision process, said WDFW’s Rod Woodin.

It is certainly not the Council’s intent to pre-judge the 1999 decision, or what the system configuration will look like post-1999, Ruff replied. However, the Congressional Appropriations language noted that the budget request for this program “...appears to reflect the pursuit of multiple restoration strategies, some which may not be adopted, rendering expensive measures obsolete.”

To set the context for the review, so as not to prejudge the 1999 system configuration decision, we came up with three future alternative scenarios to provide sideboards for the review, Ruff continued:

1. All existing mainstem dams remain in place and operational for the foreseeable future.
2. All dams remain in place except the four Lower Snake River, which are breached to provide a natural river condition in the Snake River.
3. All dams remain in place except that a Lower Columbia River project, such as John Day Dam, is breached or lowered.

Our intent, when we present the technical questions to the ISAB, is to ask that body to look at those questions in the context of these three potential system configuration alternatives, Ruff said. He added that the Council staff is considering the addition of a fourth configurational alternative to this list: drawdown of the four Lower Snake projects, plus John Day.

Various SCT participants said they were unclear about the policy context in which the Council’s review will be conducted. What kind of policy context will the Council establish for mainstem construction activities, if that context is going to go beyond the direction contained in the 1995 BiOp? Boyce asked. Because that’s the document that has guided the SCT’s activities to date. What are the sideboards for the review? Are you looking at the CRFM program only in the context of Snake River salmon, or are you going to give consideration to all fish and wildlife species in the Council’s program? What about the tribal restoration plan? All I’m saying is, the sideboards could be extremely broad, depending on which set of policy issues the Council wants to address, said Boyce. Those questions are answered on page 1 (of Enclosure C), under “Goals and Objectives of the Program” and “Scope of the Review,” Ruff replied (please see this document for details).

The discussion turned to the “Policy Elements of Review” section of the scoping document (see p. 6 of Enclosure C); Hevlin said he does not feel comfortable with the Council deciding some of these policy questions on their own – not after all the work we’ve put into trying to deal with these questions over the years, he said. So noted, said Ruff, and the SCT will have an opportunity to provide whatever input it feels is appropriate.

Moving on to the General Questions and Specific Questions listed on page 5 of the handout, Ruff said he expects to receive considerable comments from many parties in the region on this list of topics. Various SCT members offered minor comments on these questions; after some minutes of discussion, it was agreed a forum will be set up at which any interested parties can discuss these questions, as well as the details of specific CRFM program elements, with the ISAB.

I would like to see the SCT’s criteria for prioritizing CRFM program items (attached as Enclosure D) added to the policy/technical context for the Council’s review, Hevlin said. In other words, I would like to see the Council use these criteria in their review of the CRFM projects. I think the Council would certainly be interested in the rationale behind the SCT’s prioritization decisions, Ruff said.

I would ask that, if anyone else has specific comments on this scoping document, please submit them directly to me as soon as possible, Ruff continued – again, it is our goal to develop a draft work plan, including the specific questions we will ask the ISAB and the Council to review, by mid-January. Please let me know, he said, and we will do our best to accommodate your questions and concerns.

III. Review Final Project Study Plan for John Day Drawdown Studies and Letters of Support.

Hevlin distributed copies of the “Scope of Study for John Day Dam Drawdown Studies;” this document is attached as Enclosure E. Ponganis said that tomorrow (December 18) is the deadline for comments to be incorporated into this document, adding that comments received after that date will be forwarded to Congress as attachments to the John Day Drawdown Scope of Study document. Hevlin encouraged the States of Oregon and Washington, together with the Fish and Wildlife Service, to write letters of support to attach to the Scope of Study – I think it’s extremely important for those committees to see that the John Day drawdown study is attracting broad regional support, he said. If any additional letters of support are forthcoming, Ponganis said, please get them to me as soon as possible so they can be forwarded to Headquarters and included in the package we send to Congress.

We believe one of the major benefits of drawing John Day down to either spillway crest or natural river is the additional flood control capability that could provide, said Ruff – that was in the Council’s written comments on this document, but I don’t see it reflected in the most recent draft of the project study plan. I did see that comment, said Ponganis, and my understanding was that that was going to be included. I feel very strongly about this, said Ruff, and I don’t think the Council will support this study plan unless that concept is included, particularly on pages 16 and 30.

BPA’s Phil Thor added two other items he would like to see addressed more explicitly in the

study: air quality and transmission support, which he said should be added to the hydropower section. So noted, said Ponganis.

IV. NMFS Discussion of the Need for Hydraulic Modeling of Ice Harbor Drawdown for the Lower Snake Feasibility Study, USBR Discussion of Costs Associated with Procurement of an Additional 1 MAF from the Snake River Basin.

These two items both represent potential additional expenditures in FY'98, so I thought it made sense to discuss them before we get to Agenda Item V, Hevlin began. NMFS' Steve Rainey distributed Enclosure F, a brief outline and schematic detailing two alternative processes for addressing adult passage at the Lower Snake dams in the Lower Snake Feasibility Study. Process #1, the one currently endorsed by FFDRWG, includes the following steps:

- Select general adult passage criteria (with the understanding that an iterative process is required)
- A&E develop Embankment Excavation and River Channelization Report
- Hydraulic modeling and refinement of adult passage criteria
- Revision of Report to satisfaction of COE, agencies and tribes.

Unfortunately, said Rainey, this is not the process that is currently being used to develop this component of the LSRFS. The current process, which is not endorsed by FFDRWG, includes:

- Select general adult passage criteria (with the understanding that an iterative process will be required)
- A&E develop a report
 - No money to do hydraulic modeling...defers FFDRWG interaction ...means A&E product moves forward without FFDRWG scrutiny ...increases interim and long-term risk to adult migrants
 - Excavation plan with overly aggressive passage criteria (which determines channel size, costs, excavation time etc.) Is used as the basis for Study alternatives decision.

We believe that hydraulic modeling offers the best tool for us to take a look at the implications for adult passage, at the worst site (Ice Harbor), at relatively high flows, before a decision is made between alternatives, Rainey said. We believe this will ultimately produce a better adult passage decision than the path we're currently on; since Snake River drawdown is intended to benefit fish, he continued, we need to do everything we can to ensure that drawdown produces no

adverse fish impacts. For that reason, FFDRWG is recommending that a hydraulic model study be conducted; unfortunately, no funds have been designated for such a study at this time. Rainey added that the current cost estimate for this study is \$300,000.

After some minutes of debate, it was agreed to defer a fund/no fund recommendation on this study until the larger discussion of the FY'98 budget under Agenda Item V.

Moving on to the second part of this agenda item, the discussion of the cost and impact of procuring an additional 1 MAF of water from the Upper Snake, Rich Rigby of the Bureau of Reclamation said USBR has about \$1.9 million available to conduct this analysis in FY'98, under the auspices of a larger study of the Bureau's Snake River projects; unfortunately, that is

about \$300,000 less than what is needed to finish the specific economic modeling needed for the 1 MAF analysis. Again, after some minutes of debate, it was agreed to defer a fund/no fund recommendation on this study until the larger discussion of the FY'98 budget under the following agenda item.

V. Review Adjustments to the FY'98 CRFM Program; Decision on Bonneville Dam Predator Study.

Hevlin distributed Enclosure G, the most recent iteration of the "CRFM FY'98 COE Priorities" spreadsheet, dated December 17, 1997. The new spreadsheet includes columns showing the original estimated cost for each item, any changes that have been made to those budget amounts, the new estimated cost of each item, and any relevant comments. As most of you are aware, Congress appropriated \$95 million for this program in FY'98, said Ponganis; with 6% savings and slippage, that gives us \$89.2 million in actual dollars to work with. The current total, under the "New Estimate" column, is \$89,370,000, so we are already slightly above the actual amount we'll have to work with, even before we talk about adding funds for the Ice Harbor hydraulic modeling, the Upper Snake analysis or the Bonneville predator study, Ponganis said.

Ruff expressed frustration with the fact that the SCT is continuing to discuss FY'98 prioritizations, when the group's focus should be on the FY'99 program. I agree, said Ponganis – FY'99 is where we should be spending our time at this point, because that is where our real payback is going to be. I would suggest that we get through this discussion as quickly as possible, so that we can move on to FY'99.

COE's Mike Mason and Bob Willis took the group through the FY'98 spreadsheet, noting any recent changes in funding level (these changes, noted in Enclosure G, are generally self-explanatory). The group also spent a few minutes going through the list of FY'98 unfunded items (see Page 2 of Enclosure G, as well as Enclosure H, "Portland District Research Activities by Project – Funded and Unfunded.")

In response to a question, Willis assured the group that the John Day sampler should be operational by March, in time for the 1998 migration season, despite an unresolved concern about how to remove adults from the collector. In response to another question, he said the \$3.5 million now budgeted for John Day extended-length screens implementation will cover the construction of 21 screens in FY'98.

Ponganis cautioned that, given the amount of construction activity it contains, the FY'98 budget is already very tight -- many of the projects already on the funded list are more likely to increase than decrease in cost. Nevertheless, the group spent a few minutes developing a "wish list" of projects to be funded if the requisite dollars can be found in FY'98. This list is reproduced below:

- Bonneville predator study (\$360,000)
- John Day weir modifications and test (\$200,000)
- Additional Upper Snake water (1 MAF) evaluation (\$300,000)
- Lower Snake predator/prey study (\$380,000)

After a lengthy debate, there was general agreement that, if additional funds can be found, the Lower Snake predator/prey study should be the top funding priority on this list. Boyce suggested that the necessary funds for this study might be shifted from the \$2.6 million currently budgeted for Bonneville I DSM, monitoring and outfall in FY'98; it was agreed that this might be the place to look, as long as the deletion of \$380,000 from that project doesn't cause it to be delayed for another year. The Corps will see if the funds for the Lower Snake predator/prey study can be found within the current FY'98 program, looking first at Bonneville PH1 DSM, outfall and monitoring, Ponganis said.

VI. Additional Comments on FY'99 CRFM Program.

This topic was not addressed at today's meeting

VII. Discussion of Nov. 13 Letter from EPA, WDFW, WDOE and CCT to USBR Regarding Dissolved Gas Abatement at Grand Coulee Dam.

Hevlin distributed copies of the letter which had prompted this agenda item (attached as Enclosure I). He explained that, until this letter was received, Reclamation had thought that it had done a good job in coordinating its gas abatement plans at Grand Coulee with other parties of concern in the region; once the letter was received, Hevlin said, it became apparent that others in the region did not share this view.

Mainly, Reclamation is concerned because we have been very active in the SCT and DGT over the last few years, in an effort to keep the region informed about our gas abatement and other activities, said USBR's Monte McLendon. After receiving this letter, we began to wonder what forum we should be using to communicate with the other agencies, he said, because three of the four signatories to the letter are also SCT participants.

Various meeting participants commented on the quality of communication that has taken place on this issue to date; ultimately, Patty Stone of the Colville Tribes observed that, in the tribes' view, the point isn't what forum Reclamation chooses as the appropriate one for these discussions, it is the fact that opportunity exists for policy-level and technical-level discussions which will yield workable short-term solutions to the dissolved gas situation at Grand Coulee. Part of the problem, from Reclamation's standpoint, is that Grand Coulee is operated as part of a system of dams, said McLendon – operations at Grand Coulee are only a part of the picture. Any changes that are made at that project need to be placed in the context of the system as a whole – it's a very complex system, which is why we have chosen to sit down at the SCT and DGT tables.

I think it is entirely appropriate for the Bureau to use the SCT and DGT to update the region on its activities, said EPA's Mary Lou Soscia; however, I think it is going to require some policy-level interaction between Reclamation, the Corps, the State of Washington, EPA and the tribes in

order to make the actual decisions that are needed at Grand Coulee.

It sounds as though such a meeting would be appropriate, said Hevlin. At the same time, it appears to me that the signatories to the letter certainly know more about Grand Coulee gas abatement than I do, and than most of the other SCT participants do, he said. I think we could really benefit from your input, so perhaps this is an appropriate forum for at least some further discussion of this issue once the meeting between Reclamation, WDOE, the Corps, EPA and the tribes has taken place. We'll discuss this in-house, McLendon said, and see what we can do as far as setting up that meeting. Discussion of operational alternatives to reduce dissolved gas at Grand Coulee would probably be most appropriately held at the DGT level, Ruff suggested, while discussions of capital improvements, such as flip-lips, should probably be held here at SCT.

As an agency, said McLendon, we would certainly prefer to deal with this issue through forums that have already been established. I think that's the rub, said Ruff – there really isn't an established forum to deal with water quality standards, and that's what we're struggling with right now. Ron McKown observed that, given the frequency with which Grand Coulee inflow water exceeds the applicable water quality standards, Reclamation's dissolved gas reduction options are somewhat limited at that project. I think everyone is aware of the problem with high dissolved gas levels coming over the border from Canada, said Ruff – with that in mind, the Council will be sponsoring a trans-boundary workshop on ecosystem-based management in the Upper Columbia basin in late April, 1998, and water quality issues will be one of the topics on the agenda.

VIII. Progress Update on John Day Sampler.

This topic was addressed during a previous agenda item.

IX. Comments on SCT Criteria for Prioritizing CRFM Program Items.

Hevlin asked that each SCT participant review this list of criteria (attached as Enclosure D) and renumber them according to their individual priority, with number 1 being the top priority and number 13 being the lowest priority. In addition, he asked that each SCT participant assign a percentage or weight to each criteria, such that the total percentages for all 13 criteria add up to 100%. He requested that these reprioritized lists be submitted to him by January 12.

X. FFDRWG and AFEP Updates.

No updates were presented at today's meeting.

XI. Next SCT Meeting Date and Agenda Items.

The next meeting of the System Configuration Team was set for Wednesday, January 21 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at NMFS's Portland offices. With that, the meeting was adjourned.

Meeting minutes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.